

Permanency

Our Goal: Provide stable, nurturing, and permanent placements as quickly as possible for children who are placed into out-of-home care.

In 2008 the Administration received this Adoption Anniversary letter from the mother of a little girl adopted from Washington state.

Four years ago I took the very first steps to begin the journey that has evolved into “the Monroe Family.” I was hesitant to meet Sierra. She might have emotional problems that I, as an inexperienced mother would not handle right. I was afraid I might screw up this little person’s life. I was worried about attachment issues, the dogs, and the fact that I lived in a rural area, and would she just plain like me. I did not expect love. I had read all the books, gone to all the seminars. She has a biological mother that she spent most of her current life with so I could not ask her for love or expect it. She had been in 10 foster homes including some other pre-adopt homes. Trust would have to be built. Liking would be nice. Hugs would always be necessary but love – well, that might just be too much to ask for. I held myself back emotionally.



I met with her caseworker, talked to her foster mom; met her therapist. They all told me she was smart and she really wanted a family. Was I family enough? Then I met little Miss Sierra. She was quiet and subdued. She barely ate. We went to the movie (Shrek) together and then I went home to Idaho. I was asked what my decision was. What? My decision? I have to make this life altering decision for this little person? I asked her caseworker if she had talked to Sierra. Would she be happy in the country? Were her wishes and feelings being taken into account? Yes, yes, yes. My response to this question was this: I look at the little girl and I can see what she would be at 10, 12 and even in college. How could anyone not be amazed at what this little girl has to offer and not see what she could become?

Little Miss Sierra moved to Idaho, to the country. We both felt our way around. She had a therapist which I think made me feel better than her. She would be playing and all of a sudden start crying. She would climb into my lap asking for her mommy and totally confusing the other kids (nieces and nephews) who tried to help out by telling her “your mommy is right there”. Shhhh I would say to the other children. It’s ok. Her heart is breaking and then healing itself. I assured Sierra that she would always have two mommies.

I will always remember her sitting next to me in front of the judge on the day of her adoption. The judge asked me the standard questions. He got to the one where he asked if I wanted her to become my daughter and all that meant. In the brief silence we all heard Sierra as she leaned toward me and whispered “say yes, mommy”. I said yes.

Sierra’s name has been changed to protect her confidentiality

Permanency Overview

The decision to remove a child from the only home he or she has ever known is taken very seriously.

Any time a child must be removed from his or her home for reasons of abuse or neglect, every effort is made to ensure that he or she is placed in the most stable and nurturing environment possible given the circumstances.

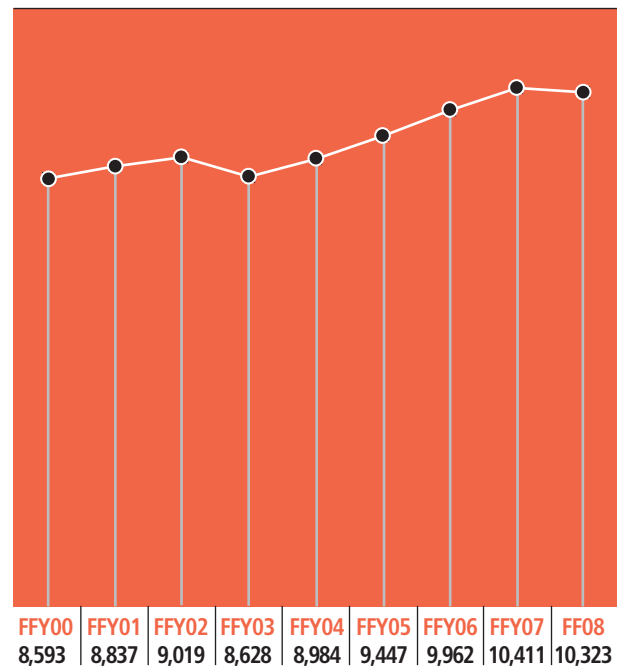
The Administration seeks first to return children home whenever it is safe and in the best interest of the child. However, if parents are unable or unwilling to demonstrate the ability to safely parent their children, other permanency options are explored. Often reunification efforts and other permanency planning are done concurrently.

Children's Administration staff members also make concerted efforts to identify and locate extended family members as well as family friends who have the desire and ability to raise children. This allows children to maintain a sense of familiarity and continuity with familial, community, and cultural identity.

The following performance measures are used:

- Children reunified with their families.
- Children reunified within 12 months of placement.
- Children adopted.
- Children adopted within 24 months of placement.
- Children placed in guardianships.
- Length-of-stay for children in care.
- Children re-entering care.
- Children with no more than two placements.
- African American and Native American children in long term care.
- Children placed with relatives.

Number of Children Cared for in Out-of-Home Placement*



*Count of children in out-of-home care on the last day of the fiscal year, excluding children in guardianships. Source: July 2008 CAMIS download.

OBJECTIVE:

Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care

MEASURED BY:

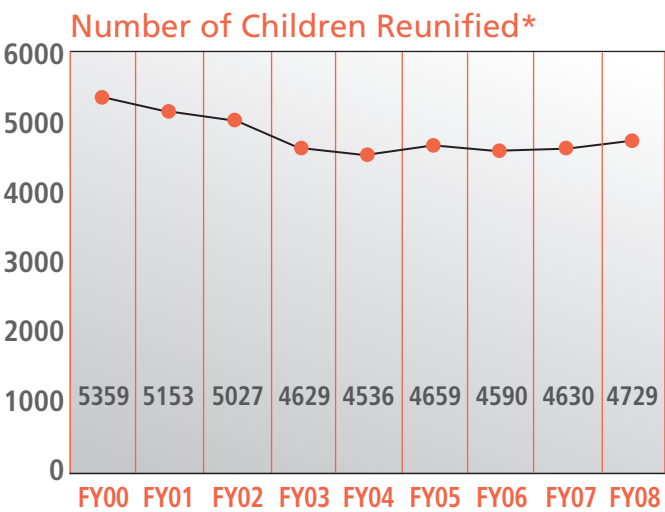
Children reunified with their families

Federal and Washington state laws require that children must be reunified with their parents or legal guardians whenever it is safe and in the best interest of the children.

Children’s Administration works to ensure that parents from whom children have been removed due to abuse or neglect are given access to services and community supports designed to help them safely parent their children.

Prior to returning any child home, the Administration conducts a reunification assessment to address safety and works with families to ensure that safeguards are in place to support parents and prevent children from experiencing additional harm.

Washington’s reunification rate increased in FY 2008 for the third consecutive year.



*Unduplicated count of children placed in out-of-home care who were reunified with their families. Children may be placed in out-of-home care and reunified with their families more than once during a fiscal year, and previous Children’s Administration Performance Reports used duplicated counts. Source: September 2008 CAMIS download.



OBJECTIVE:

Increase permanency for children in out-of home care

MEASURED BY:

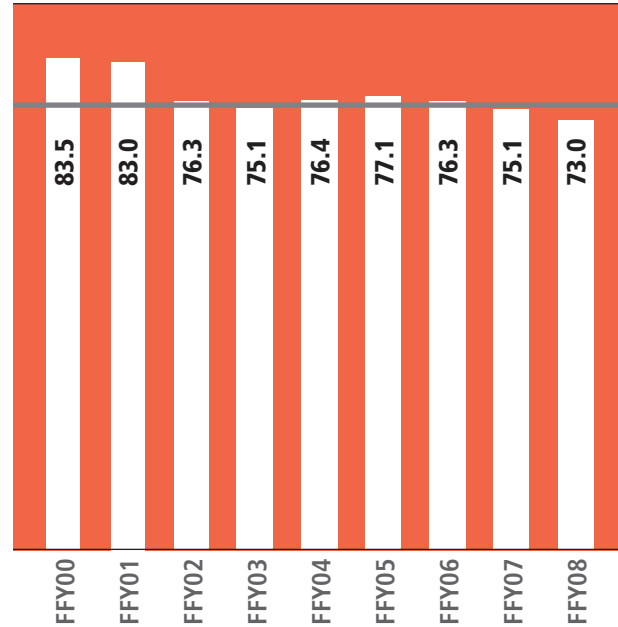
Children reunified within 12 months of placement

While every effort is made to return children to their homes and families within 12 months of placement, the Administration maintains safety as its first priority.

Often the implementation of necessary safety measures and community supports takes time. When priorities compete, child safety is always paramount and the rate of timely reunification may decline as a result.

The number of children reunified with their parents has increased over recent years; however, the time to return children to their homes has demonstrated a slight decline over the same period.

Percentage of Children Reunified Within 12 Months of Placement*



*Percent of children reunified with their parents within 12 months of placement into out-of-home care. The federal standard is 76.2 percent or higher. Source: federal fiscal year data as of September 2008 submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System. Prior to FFY 2008, data was based upon June counts as in most cases, September data was not available at the time this report was submitted.

OBJECTIVE:

Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care

MEASURED BY:

Children adopted

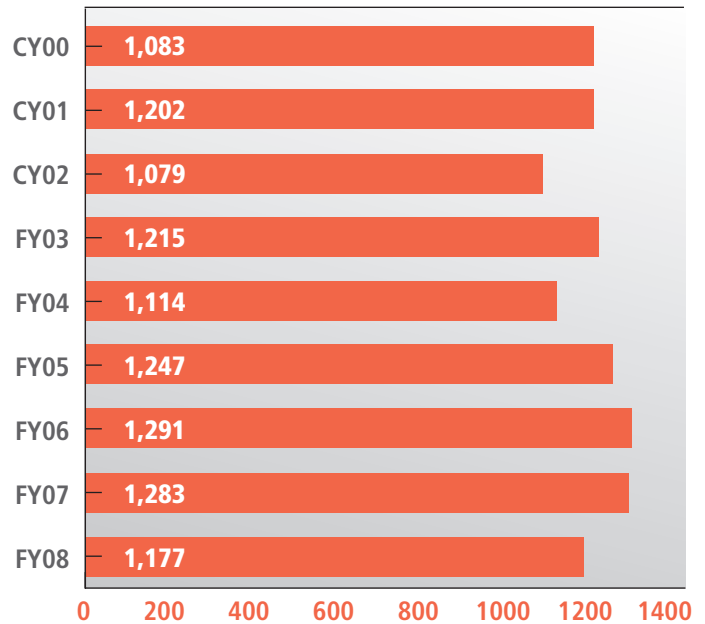
Despite the very best efforts of agency staff, community-based service providers, and parents themselves, some children simply cannot safely be returned home.

The next best option for many of these children is adoption. Adoption means that a child really belongs to a family and that their parents and siblings are really theirs “for keeps.”

Over the ten-year period shown more than 11,600 children have been legally adopted in Washington state through the child welfare system.



Number of Children Adopted*



*Number of children placed in out-of-home care who were adopted as of the end of the fiscal year. Source: October 2008 CAMIS download.

OBJECTIVE:

Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care

MEASURED BY:

Children adopted within 24 months of placement

All children need and deserve safe, stable, and loving permanent families.

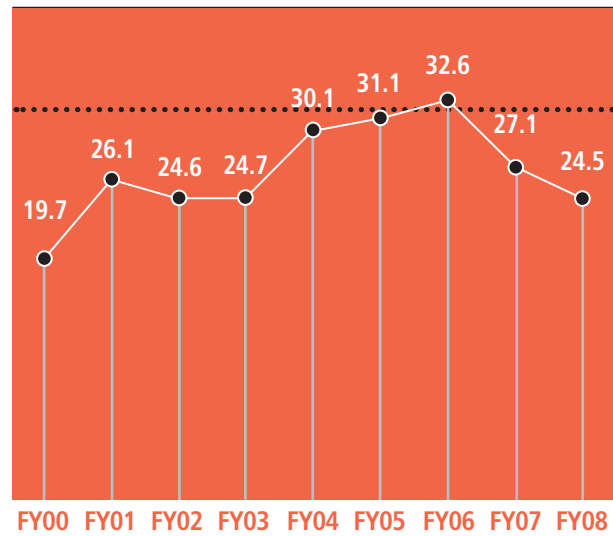
When children enter the foster care system as the result of caregiver abuse or neglect, immediate efforts are employed to help those caregivers safely parent their children. At the same time, the Administration engages in a process of concurrent planning to find an alternative permanent home should reunification efforts fail.

The goal of concurrent planning is to prevent children from languishing in temporary foster care by making diligent efforts to secure safety and permanency regardless of whether a child returns home.

Children who enter state care after the age of five, children of color, sibling groups, and children with special physical, mental, or behavioral needs tend to stay in foster care longer than very young, healthy children. The prior are often described as “harder to place” children.

This measure does not reflect the total number of children moving toward permanency; rather it monitors the number of months to achieve permanency. As increased work is done to secure permanency for “harder to place children” while maintaining efforts to ensure timely permanency for new children entering the system, the overall percentage of children adopted within 24 months declines.

Percentage of Children Adopted Within 24 Months of Placement*



*Percent of children with a permanency plan of adoption who were adopted within 24 months of placement into out-of-home care. The federal standard is 32 percent or higher. Source: federal fiscal year data as of September 2008 submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System.

OBJECTIVE:

Increase permanency for children in out-of-home care

MEASURED BY:

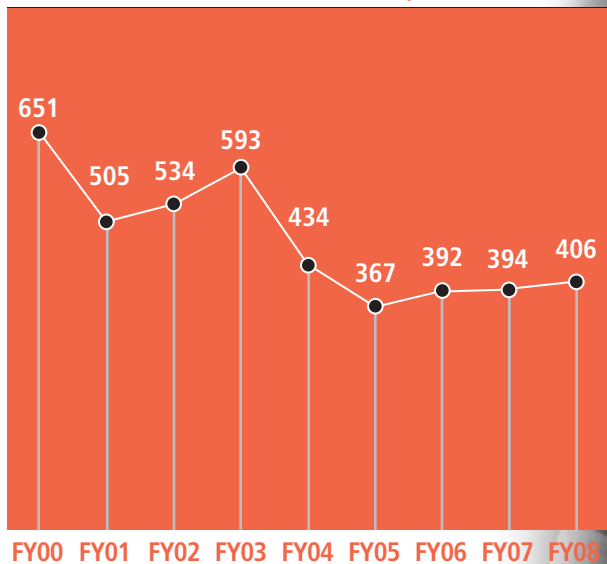
Children placed in guardianships

For some children, particularly older youth who maintain strong familial attachments or children with certain faith or cultural affiliations, adoption is not necessarily the best option.

For these young people a permanent plan of guardianship provides the stability and belonging that occurs when a family makes a long term commitment to caring for them.

Over the past four years the number of new guardianships has remained relatively consistent.

Number of Children Placed in New Guardianships*



*Number of children placed in out-of-home care with an accomplished permanent plan of placement in a guardianship granted through either the Superior Court or Juvenile Court system. Source: September 2008 CAMIS download.



OBJECTIVE:

Decrease length of stay without re-entry

MEASURED BY:

Length of stay for children in care

The Children's Administration must make every effort to ensure that children transition to safe, permanent placements whether they return home, are placed with relatives, or are adopted. The time it takes to ensure child safety and to secure the most suitable and stable placement for a given child varies depending upon the specific needs of that child.

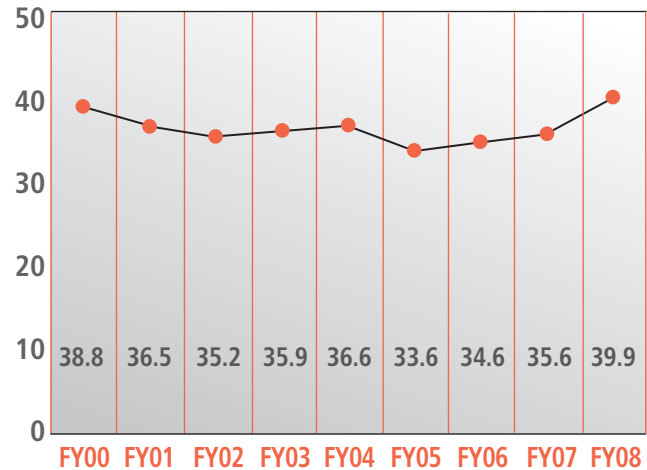
The Administration works to ensure that no child remains in temporary care any longer than necessary. Efforts are also made to ensure that once children are in permanent placements, they don't return to care due to additional incidents of abuse or neglect.

In Fiscal Year 2008, the Administration reported both the highest percent of children in care for more than two years and children experiencing the longest median time in care over the nine year period reported.

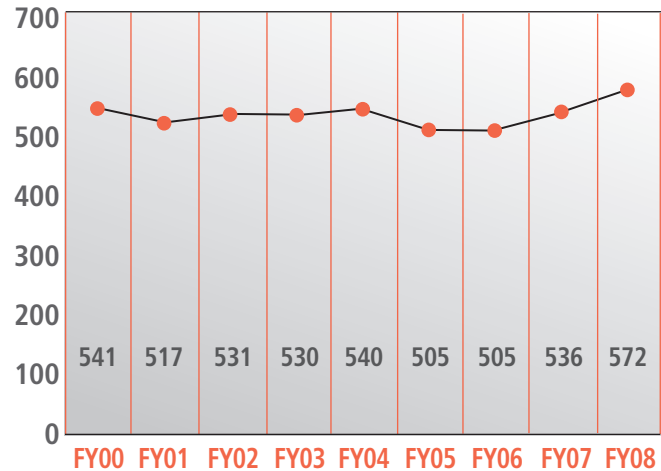
Trends in the proportion of removals of very young children and for children placed due to neglect may be associated with the observed increases in length-of-stay. The families of these children often require multiple, longer term supports to equip them to adequately parent.

The neglect legislation which became effective in 2007 increased the emphasis on providing support services to families exhibiting chronic neglect. Children's Administration involvement with these families often requires long term intervention resulting in longer lengths of stay for children placed in out-of-home care.

Percentage of Children
in Care for More Than 2 Years*



Median Number of Days
Children are Placed in Care**



*Percent of children in the Administration's custody in out-of-home care for more than 60 days, who have a cumulative time in care during their current placement episode of more than two years. Source: September 2008 CAMIS download.

**Median cumulative time in care for all children in care for more than 60 days. This measure is calculated based upon the population of children in care for more than 60 days to more clearly depict the status of children for whom the Administration is actively conducting permanency planning. Sixty days was the chosen "cut off" point because children who stay in care at least 60 days must have a permanency plan completed at this point. If children placed for very short periods of time were included in this measure, it would inaccurately skew the understanding of the percent of children who are placed for much longer periods of time. Source: July 2008 CAMIS download.



OBJECTIVE:

Decrease length of stay
without increasing re-entry

MEASURED BY:

Children re-entering care

The Children's Administration must conduct a careful safety evaluation prior to returning any child to a home from which he or she was removed due to parental maltreatment.

The Administration must have reasonable assurance that a family has improved its ability to provide for a child's basic needs, nurture that child, and discipline the child in a manner that is appropriate and consistent with a child's developmental age.

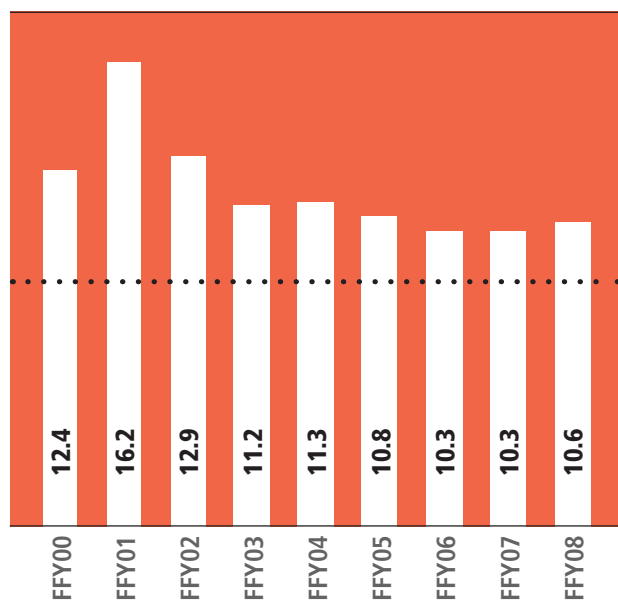
Likewise, families often require ongoing support and access to community resources after children are returned home.

The Administration remains engaged with families for varying periods of time following reunification based upon individual family needs and legal status.

The Administration works with families and communities to prevent placing children into out-of-home care who previously have been placed in care.

The federal standard requires that no more than 8.6 percent of children in out-of-home care will re-enter care within 12 months of reunification with their families. Washington state has demonstrated re-entry rates of between 10.3 percent and 16.2 percent for the nine year period shown with an average performance of 11.8 percent.

Percentage of Children Re-entering Care
Within 12 Months of Reunification*



*Percent of children who re-entered out-of-home care within 12 months of reunification with their parents, regardless of length of stay. The federal standard is 8.6 percent or less. Source: federal fiscal year data as of June 2008 submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).

OBJECTIVE:

Increase stability for children in out-of-home care

MEASURED BY:

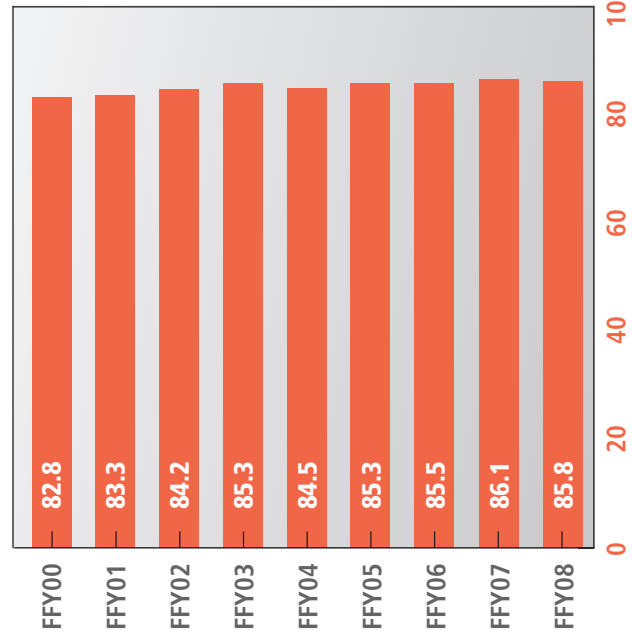
Children with no more than two placements

Children's Administration works with foster parents and kinship caregivers to provide nurturing, stable placements for children in out-of-home care. A sense of stability can help children maintain academic and developmental gains and sustain emotional well-being.

The Children's Administration works toward increasing the chances of placement stability through a variety of strategies. Efforts are made to carefully screen substitute caregivers and to secure the best possible placements for children. Most recently the Administration increased the frequency with which social workers visit children in their out-of-home placements in an effort to monitor each child's adjustment and offer needed supports to substitute caregivers.

The federal standard for this measure is 86.7 percent. While there was a slight decrease in this measure for FFY08, the Administration has made gains toward the federal standard throughout the past nine years.

Percentage of Children With No More Than Two Placements*



*Percent of children who have only one or two principle places or homes of residence (placement events) during their first 12 months in care (or exiting from care within 12 months), excluding respite care, hospital stays, on-the-run, and similar types of placements which do not represent a deliberate change of residence. The federal standard is 86.7 percent or higher. Source: federal fiscal year data as of June 2008 submitted to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).



OBJECTIVE:

Decrease over-representation of African American and Native American children in care

MEASURED BY:

African American and Native American children in care for more than two years

Children of color, specifically those of African American and Native American descent tend to come into state care at higher rates than Caucasian children and stay in care for longer periods of time.

The overrepresentation of African American and Native American children in the child welfare system is not just a statewide concern but is an issue affecting children of color throughout the country.

In 2008 the Administration published a report titled “Racial Disproportionality in Washington State” addressing some of the key questions and concerns about youth representing specific racial and ethnic groups in child welfare.

Some of the major findings from that report include: The greatest disproportionality for children of color occurs when:

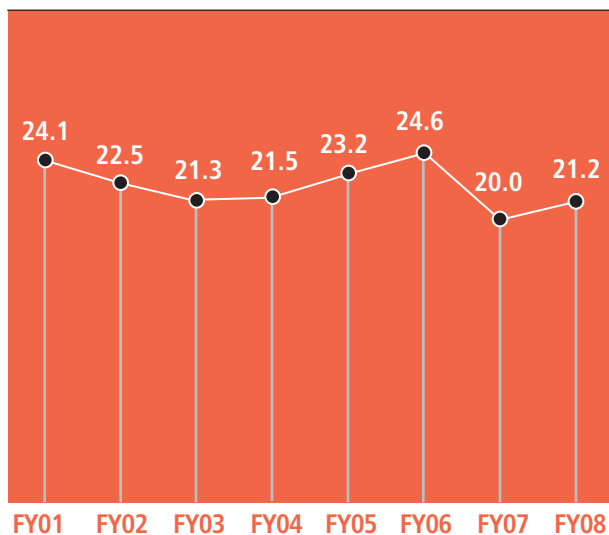
- The initial referral to Child Protective Services is made.
- The decision to remove the child from home is made.
- A child is in care for more than two years.

Additionally the report found that when compared with White children:

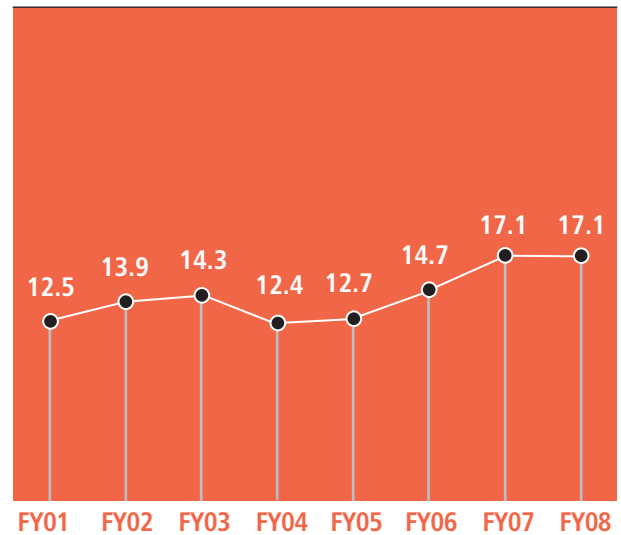
- Indian children are 1.6 times as likely to be removed from home and 2.2 times as likely to remain in foster care for longer than two years.
- Black children are 1.2 times more likely to be removed from home and 1.5 times more likely to remain in care for more than two years.
- Hispanic children were no more likely to be removed from home or to remain in care for longer than two years.

In Washington state efforts are under way to address over-representation of minority children in care.

Percentage of African American Children in Care for More Than 2 Years*



Percentage of Native American Children in Care for More Than 2 Years**



*Percent of children who have been placed in out-of-home care for two years or longer who are not in their permanent home and are African American. Source: September 2008 CAMIS download.

**Percent of children whom have been placed in out-of-home care for two years or longer who are not in their permanent home and are Native American. Source: September 2008 CAMIS download.

OBJECTIVE:

Increase relative placements

MEASURED BY:

Children placed with relatives

The Administration strives to lessen the challenges that children confront when moving into unfamiliar surroundings.

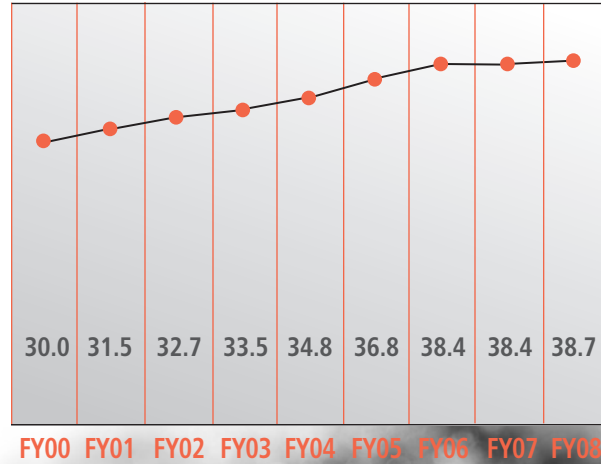
Whenever it is safe and in the best interest of the children involved, the Administration makes concerted efforts to identify family members who are able and willing to care for their relatives.

In Fiscal Year 2008, Children's Administration implemented new legislation allowing for broader definition of "family" so that suitable individuals known to children could be possible placements.

When children can be safely placed with people who are familiar to them in surroundings that reflect their culture, in communities where their language is spoken and their customs are practiced, they experience a greater sense of belonging and stability.

The percent of children in out-of-home care who are placed with relatives has consistently increased over the nine year period shown.

Percentage of Children
in Placement With Relatives*



*The percent of children in placement with a relative on the last day of the fiscal year. Source: July 2008 CAMIS download.





We often tell our children
to “be patient,” “take turns,”
or simply to “wait.”

The things for which our children wait are rarely life altering.
In a child’s mind the wait for even the smallest joys like a
turn on a park swing or an after dinner treat can feel eternal.

Imagine your child or any child waiting months, years, or a
lifetime to know that they are loved, that they belong, that
they have people to call “family” and a place to call “home.”

The Children’s Administration and our regional and national partners are working to
help find these children and others like them a family to love them, a place of their own.
If you would like to open your heart and home to these or other waiting children
please contact any of the following:

- Washington Adoption Resource Network**..... www.warekids.org
1-800-927-9411
- Northwest Adoption Exchange*** www.nwae.org
1-800-927-9411
- Northwest Resource Associates**www.nwresource.org/af.htm
- Families Like Ours** www.familieslikeours.org
(206) 441-7602
- Adopt U.S. Kids**..... www.adoptuskids.org
1-888-200-4005

*Information about waiting children included on this page is excerpted from the Northwest Adoption Exchange Website.

At any given time in Washington state about 2,000 children wait for the knowledge that they are wanted and that they belong to someone and someone belongs to them.

These are just a few of the children who wait.

Dino is 13 years old and has been waiting for more than three years. He said, "The family I would choose would have a mom or a dad that would help me, there would be some kids close to my own age and they would like sports." Dino says he wants a family to just "be with and hang out together."

Kayla is a 16 year old girl who has been waiting two years. Kayla is a young woman who is responsible, motivated to do well, and knows what she wants. She is very social and is looking for "laid back people" either two moms or a mom and a dad, "who will understand my needs."

Zachary 10, **Jordan** 9, and **Joshua** 8, are three brothers who have been waiting for more than four years. They are described as "delightful, sweet, resilient, and engaging boys" who are eager to grow up together. The boys need a family who can provide structure, nurturing, and attention and will allow them to feel a part of the African American community.

Jennifer is a 14 year old girl who has been waiting three years. Jennifer loves gymnastics, horseback riding, and writing poetry. Jennifer said, "It's so important for kids my age to have a loving family because kids my age go through a lot of stress and it would be nice if we could have a shoulder to lean on and help solve our problems."

Ignacio "Nacho" is a kind and creative 15 year old boy who has been waiting 12 years. Nacho likes music and has even recorded a rap CD of his own. He loves all kinds of outdoor activities and is fond of pets. He needs a family that is not looking for "perfection" but rather is very accepting and finds joy in the road to improvement. With love, encouragement, stability, and commitment, Nacho's kind heart will surely shine.

Of the seven children featured in last year's "Children Wait", three are still waiting.